



1000 FRIENDS of Connecticut

P.O. Box 1988 • Hartford, CT 06144-1988 • 860.523.0003 • www.1000friends-ct.org

PRESERVING, CONSERVING AND GROWING SMART

Testimony to the Housing Committee on

5589 An Act Concerning Smart Growth Principles in Affordable Housing Plans

February 17, 2009

Senator Gomes, Representative Green, members of the Housing Committee, good afternoon. My name is Heidi Green. I am the president of the statewide smart growth organization, 1000 Friends of Connecticut. 1000 Friends of Connecticut conducts research, education and advocacy on the interconnected web of policies that sustain robust cities, lively downtowns, compact, walkable neighborhoods, transit and affordable housing options, and a healthy natural environment for clean air, water, wildlife habitat, and a viable agricultural sector. In addition, it was my pleasure to serve as one of three co-chairs of the Economic Development Subgroup of the Smart Growth Working Group. The Economic Development Subgroup met to analyze state policies and investments in affordable housing, brownfield remediation and reuse, transit, and transit oriented development. Among its recommendations adopted by the Working Group was a recommendation that the state adopt a definition of *smart growth* and to filter state investments using a smart growth screen.

We recommend that affordable housing projects that meet smart growth criteria receive extra consideration for funding. If a project is near transit, is green, or is built such that the residents of the development are able to get from home to work using human power, walking/cycling, that development should receive a higher ranking in the scoring process. The language of proposed bill **5589 An Act Concerning Smart Growth Principles in Affordable Housing Plans** seems to take this idea a bit too far by *requiring* affordable housing to comply with smart growth. Smart growth is a strong goal for state investment. In the case of affordable housing however, we do not recommend it be a threshold.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. Please think of 1000 Friends of Connecticut as a resource for you in the weeks ahead. I'm happy to field any questions you may have.

The Board and Staff of 1000 Friends of Connecticut

Heidi Green, President

Smart Growth Principles

1. Mix land uses;
2. Take advantage of existing community assets;
3. Create a range of housing opportunities;
4. Foster walkable, close-knit neighborhoods;
5. Promote distinctive, attractive communities;
6. Preserve key natural areas;
7. Strengthen and encourage growth in existing communities;
8. Provide a variety of transportation choices;
9. Make development decisions predictable, fair and cost-effective;
10. Welcome citizen and stakeholder participation.

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Four-Part Smart Growth Agenda

For robust cities and downtowns, to sustainably grow our state and local economies, and to protect critical natural resources, we must make comprehensive changes to the state's development policies and investment priorities. Those changes must include: 1. reducing our reliance on the property tax; 2. improving regional cooperation; 3. modernizing local zoning codes; and 4. investing strategically and in the long-term best interests of the people and the state.

In the 2009 Session of the Connecticut General Assembly, the global economic and state fiscal crises will make smart growth policies a higher priority than ever. At the same time, there are real opportunities at hand and we must be prepared to seize them.

There is a slowdown in the pace of growth, let's use it to align plans and shape policies to direct investment toward sustainable development when the credit markets loosen. In recent years, with budget surpluses, Connecticut state government has fallen woefully short of paying its share of education, special education, and reimbursements for property tax exempt parcels. The current strain on the state budget means that already strapped municipalities will likely to be asked to do even more, increasing the pressure to raise property taxes. Let's be sure any cuts at the state level don't increase our reliance on the property tax, and let's target state revenue enhancements to reducing property taxes when the economy rebounds. Our out-dated transportation system hinders economic development and forces us to spend ever more hours in our cars. Let's capitalize on the federal stimulus and low gasoline prices to reduce vehicle miles travelled by ramping-up state transit investment. Connecticut has tens-of-thousands of acres of contaminated sites in our cities and older industrial areas, let's create green economy jobs cleaning them up and make high ranking sites ready for newly productive lives when the economy gets sunnier.